

**Testimony of Nancy W. Gentes, Executive Director
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Public Hearing – March 3, 2015
Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget**

My testimony is in opposition to the proposal to eliminate funding for the Family School Connection Programs, currently funded by the Office of Early Childhood.

Would the Governor or you as legislators want to eliminate a Family School Connection Program that helps to close the educational achievement gap? This program works with high risk elementary children and their families in three Connecticut communities. These are young children that are frequently absent, truant, have academic or behavioral problems, or come to school unprepared. **Family School Connection addresses absenteeism, one of the key indicators selected by the legislators' own Children's Committee Report card.** Their parents are often not adequately engaged with their child's school or attending to their child's educational needs. Most often there are problems at home getting in the way of the child's progress at school, and the school needs a way to reach out to the family in a non-threatening way. DCF is not the answer - Family School Connection is. It is not rocket science to understand the connection between attending school and positive school achievement. Attendance improves when children and families are engaged.

A key component of the engagement is helping families learn about the positive impact of good attendance and the negative effects of chronic absenteeism on realizing their hopes and dreams for their children. Home visitors work with the families to identify problems, develop plans, improve parenting skills, connect with the school, spend more time with the children, and learn problem solving skills. Children in the program make promising gains in attendance, behavior and academics, and the parents become more connected to their schools, improve their skills and stabilize their families.

- All children, regardless of socio-economic background, do worse academically in 1st grade if they are chronically absent (missing 10 percent or more of school including excused and unexcused absences) in kindergarten. A recent study in California found that only 17 percent of children chronically absent in both kindergarten and 1st grade were proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade as compared to 64 percent of their peers who attended regularly (missing less than 5 percent of school.)
- Going to school regularly in the early years is especially critical for children living in poverty, who are less likely to have the resources to make up for lost time in the classroom. Among poor children, chronic absence in kindergarten predicts the lowest levels of educational achievement at the end of 5th grade.
- Available well before the results of standardized tests — typically in 3rd grade — chronic absence can be an important early warning sign that intervention may be needed to ensure a child is on the path to success.

We have successfully partnered with two elementary schools in Norwich, to make differences in hundreds of children's lives since the inception of this unique program. **Because of the success we have, the program has expanded into Griswold. I would ask you to consider the wisdom of cutting successful programs that are helping young children now in school and community settings to succeed in school and to close the achievement gap?**

Thank you, always for your careful consideration and support of restoration of funding for this program.